



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on July 21, 2023

Baffled by a Playdate

A mom took to TikTok, begging for advice: “My kid was outside, another kid was walking outside somewhere, and then they stopped and started playing together.”

She was baffled.

The mom went on to explain that the unknown kid was 8 years old. He was polite and seemed well cared for. He came into the house with her son, and they proceeded to play video games all afternoon. The polite, nameless boy didn’t leave for six and a half hours.



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That was the issue.

The mom didn’t understand how a child could make a new friend, come over, and play without his mom or dad freaking out and searching for him. If her own son had disappeared for six hours, she added, she would be calling the police.

Now that this boy was under her roof, she said, she had absolutely no idea what to do next.

“I don’t know this kid, I don’t know his mom, I don’t know where he lives,” she said.

At some point, some sort of communication occurred between the TikTok mom and the mystery boy; he told her he had a curfew of 8:30 p.m.

But that only left the mom with more problems to ponder: “Do I walk him home at 6:30 so I can meet the parent and introduce myself?” she mused. “Or do I just let him go, or do I call someone?”

While the video was subsequently made private, over 100,000 people viewed it. This prompted Yahoo! News to write about it, and over 800 people left comments on the article. Many of the elder commenters pointed out that when they were kids, this had been a perfectly normal way to make friends:

“If an 8-year-old is old enough to talk and tell you their curfew, then they can tell you their parent’s phone number.”

“According to FBI statistics we are safer now than ever before... This boy is a free-range kid.”

“Don’t ask random people online for things you should be able to figure out on your own.”

I would like to add a few observations. First, parents have been bombarded by articles like “10 Tips for a Safe Sandbox Playdate.” They think every parenting act requires expert advice. Faced with a question, they immediately consult their phones for help.

Second, parenting has become such a landmine that instead of doing something hands-on and simple — like calling the other parent or walking the boy home — parents feel dicey about any interactions with kids who are not theirs.

Third, children’s lives have become so micromanaged that the idea of a kid being able to take care of himself for any stretch of time seems either miraculous or suspicious. We find ourselves marveling at



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the kind of superkid that can entertain himself — and also stay alive — for an entire afternoon and evening.

We have de-normalized and even criminalized the idea of kids being out and about on their own. That's why I particularly appreciated a comment that read, "At least she didn't call CPS."

In a follow-up TikTok, the mom apparently told viewers that when it was time for the kid to leave, she did end up walking him home.

The boy's parents, she reported, "were not concerned in the slightest. That was wild to me!"

What's wild is that a capable child went out to play on his own, made it home by curfew, and nothing bad happened — and it was considered news.

Lenore Skenazy is president of Let Grow, a contributing writer at Reason.com, and author of Has the World Gone Skenazy? To learn more about Lenore Skenazy (Lskenazy@yahoo.com) and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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